



THE MILITARY DIMENSION OF THE ANTI-TERRORIST OPERATION

Deja vu... Afghanistan once again and war once again...



Familiar sun-bleached, dusty landscapes that I thought I had left for good when our IL-76 TD plane stuffed with the "demobees" and returnees of the limited contingent was slowly spiraling upwards, away from American *Stingers* fired time and again by the dushmans, and gaining altitude to fly from Kabul to Tashkent, which meant home.

Unlike then, though, it is not the Soviet Army keeping the Americans out of the region, but the Americans and their allies fighting for their future which they would like to see at least as promising as it looked before September 11. It is not that they have a great variety of choices. Their opponents called America the root of all evil and declared war not only on the USA as a state, but on American international policy and their system of values as well.

The USA, supported by their allies, took up the challenge, and thus the war began. It is a most unusual war - the greatest world powers are engaged in a combat not with a state but with a phenomenon called international terrorism and with those who harbor it. Terrorism does not have many military facilities to be targeted by air raids. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the campaign is not crushing their military potential, nor is it forcing a separate state to capitulate, but rather eradicating the phenomenon itself, which, significantly, is spread far beyond Afghanistan.

Yet their enemies have got other means of warfare, including weapons and other fighting facilities scattered all over the world. So Afghanistan is only the beginning, the first stage. The second stage is bound to follow but no one will dare predict either its time limits or its outcomes.

Stage One: DESTROYING THE Nest

Afghanistan

Commenting on the beginning of the military stage in the anti-terrorist operation with the air raids against Afghanistan, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Mr. A. Zlenko said: "Every effort should be made to complete the military phase and turn to purely diplomatic means, economic and humanitarian methods of settling this global crisis".

Our minister must remember the lessons of the Soviet occupation of that poor country, torn apart by ethnic conflicts but nevertheless populated with a proud people. He also must be aware that, for a number of reasons, it will be extremely difficult to combat terror and restore peace in Afghanistan by traditional military means, and that it will be absolutely impossible to occupy it.

Fighting in Afghanistan is very hard, primarily because of its unique relief and climate conditions, under which Americans and Europeans alike can hardly survive, let alone fight. The major part of the country's territory is occupied by the high Hindu Kush mountain ridge. Water resources are scarce, especially in summertime; epidemics of such diseases as hepatitis, typhus, malaria, cholera, amoebiasis and others break out now and again but the local population has developed an immunity to them; temperature rises and falls sharply during the day; from time to time sand storms devastate the settlements, etc.

Few roads, steep canyons and mountain caverns, houses surrounded with high walls and underground water passages in the valleys make this area an ideal place for ambushes and diversions.

The basic difference between the mountainous relief in Afghanistan and that in the European countries we are familiar with, is that it is much easier to keep one's defenses there while it is much more difficult to go on the offensive. Some time ago a group of military academy cadets were set a task to simulate, using a standard computer modeling procedure, a defensive fought by a motorized infantry battalion in the mountains. According to standard estimations, this battalion could repel the attack of a tank-supported brigade (5-6 times as strong).

To make a long story short, it is easier to organize ambushes there, to shoot down flying targets, to block the routs of troops relocation and supplies delivery (particularly by mining the whole terrain), and then to escape artillery fire and direct pursuit.

Yet the list of factors and conditions that are much more trying and challenging there will not be this short. I can remember but some of these factors:

- there is little room for the maneuver and transportation of even relatively small combat units, to say nothing of tank-supported battalion;
- the engine power of combat machines and transport reduces dramatically at high altitudes due to the low content of oxygen in the air;
- there are very few roads fit for heavy military equipment, like tanks, artillery units and engineer trucks, which limits its capacity in rendering fire support to infantry. The latter reminds me of pack animals burdened with their usual rifles plus large-caliber machineguns, flame-throwers, mobile anti-tank missile launchers (to attack the enemy in shelters) and even mine throwers. Besides, they would carry several sets of ammunition, and a heap of other equipment - backsights, radio stations, etc., as well as water, food and drugs;
- it is very difficult for the artillery to hit the targets located on hill slopes in the so-called "dead zones";
- if some of the fellow servicemen got trapped in an ambush or were surrounded, or if the wounded need to be evacuated, it is often almost impossible to conduct a maneuver, bring in the reserve troops or withdraw the shattered units;
- repairing the damaged machinery and equipment, finding the troops' bearing on the ground and maintaining communications turn into insurmountable difficulties. And so on ...

Obviously, that was why among the most valuable military specialties in the Soviet Army during the Afghan war were not tank-men or fighter-pilots, as in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, but field engineers, helicopter pilots, transport and assault aircraft pilots, military intelligence men, doctors and, perhaps, snipers.

Successful occupation of Afghanistan is impossible, first and foremost, because of the weak, almost-non-existent statehood of that country, the Northern part of which is populated predominantly by the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and some other ethnic groups, while the Southern and central parts - by the Pashtuns (making up 50% of the country's overall population) who are also one of the major ethnic groups in neighboring Pakistan. There are no precise data on the country's population (estimations vary within 15-25 million people). The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (the Durand line) drawn in the time of the collapse of the colonial British Empire does not exist other than on the map. The Pashtuns refuse to recognize it and traditionally migrate from one country to the other, as the situation changes. Therefore, any potential conqueror will have to shoulder the burden of the bureaucratic and any other type of state control while the "ungrateful" locals are doing all they can to drive the invaders off.

The central power in Kabul is only capable of controlling the capital and larger settlements, but not the entire country. Over the last 30 years, during which tribal wars were suspended once to fight the Soviet "shuravi", the confrontation between the Pashtuns composing the core of the Taliban movement and the rest of the ethnic groups loyal, chiefly, to the Northern Alliance has sharpened.

Besides, one should never forget about the Afghani's independent mentality: even the coalition's potential allies among them claim they will not tolerate any foreign military presence in their territory. The fact that the Afghani population is Muslim and the prospective occupants are, for the most part, Christian, means that any minor conflict will threaten to exacerbate hostility towards them, including the religious one.

Hardly any world power would be able to bake a three-layer pie "*Afghanistan non-Pashtuns - Afghanistan Pashtuns - Pakistan Pashtuns*" reaching from the North to the South, i.e. to impose peace on all tribes in the new post-Taliban Afghanistan, after everything that has happened so far and is still to happen. More effective and other-than-military methods should be used for that.

About two decades ago, the Soviet armed forces won a series of tactical victories in their war with the Muslim Mujaheds but they lost their strategic battle because they were trying to resolve non-military problems by military means, by occupation. They committed the same error as the Americans in Vietnam who had mistaken involvement in the civil war with the struggle against Communism.

Taliban and their guests

Ethnically, the Taliban movement is mostly made up of the Pashtuns. The majority of Taliban leaders are the former medrese students from the Afghani refugee camps in Pakistan ("talib" means "student"). The movement was conceived in Afghanistan in 1994, seized power in 1994 and has been more or less successfully ruling the country until recently, with direct support from Pakistani military intelligence.

Their ideology is rooted in a radical interpretation of Islam by the movement's leaders that manifested itself, in particular, in their order that all men should have beards while women should wear burkas, in the prohibition for women to work outside the home and for girls over eight to go school. Adultery, homosexuality, unlicensed possession of a radio or television, preaching any religion besides Islam and many other similar sins are to be punished by death. Men having joint meals with women is also strictly prohibited, whereas drug taking or selling is not treated as a crime.

...uching any religion besides Islam and many other similar sins are to be punished by death. Men having joint meals with women is also strictly prohibited. ...ing is not treated as a crime.

The Taliban managed to win the upper hand in the country not only due to military support from Pakistan, naturally interested in ensuring stability in Afghanistan and not, not only due to financial assistance from its loyalists in Saudi Arabia and some other Islamic states, not only due to 500 militant volunteers from the Arab world fighting for it, but mainly because the Afghans themselves grew weary of endless armed disputes ripping apart the country after the Soviets had left it. Therefore a lot of Taliban commanders decided to unite under its banner, except for those of the Uzbek and Tajik units that have maintained control over 10% of the territory in the North-East of Afghanistan - of the Northern Alliance.

Table 1 shows the Taliban's military potential before the recent operation.

Table 1

Armed forces of the Taliban (before October 7)

Land forces	About 80,000 - 85,000 people Up to 160 tanks produced in the former Soviet Union 250 armored vehicles of different types About 200 artillery mounts of different calibers Anti-aircraft weapons: 300 anti-aircraft guns of different calibers 20 "Strela" and "Stiger" Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS)
Air forces	20-25 MiG-21 fighter planes

The question is: where on earth have the almost mystic Osama bin Laden (also known as the Prince, Emir, Mujahed Shayah, Hadj and Director) and terrorist training camps come from. And why is Taliban so persistently unwilling to part with him?

Osama bin Laden alleged to be the mastermind and sponsor of the September 11 terror attacks against the USA, as well as of a number of earlier acts, such as the failed attempt to blow up the International Trade Center in New York in 1993, blasting of the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998, explosion on board the American *Coul* torpedo boat destroyer in the fall of 2000 and some others, first arrived in Afghanistan after its occupation by the Soviet Union in 1979. He came there to fight against the Soviets together with the mujaheds whom he also supported financially. There, in Afghanistan, he set up a terrorist organization al-Qaida (the Base) to unite his most ardent adherents. After the Soviet troops withdrawal bin Laden returned to his home country to engage in his family business. But in 1991 he had to leave Saudi Arabia because of his conflict with the authorities over the American armed presence in the country. Since then he has been waging a virulent struggle against the USA.

In 1996 bin Laden was deported from Sudan. It was then that he made use of his long-standing acquaintance with the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and, accompanied by his al-Qaida guerillas, moved to Afghanistan. Bin Laden is believed to have granted very substantial military and financial aid to the Taliban. For instance, he is alleged to be behind the murder of Ahmad Shakh Masud, the highly praised Northern Alliance leader, equally respected by friends and opponents, just two days before the September 11 attacks.

In 1996 bin Laden called on all Muslims to kill American servicemen in Saudi Arabia, in 1998 he called on all Muslims to kill US civilians as well. The same year he claimed to be channeling 30 million US dollars to these ends.

By that time the terrorists had been trained in 12 camps concentrated in the mountainous areas around Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad in Afghanistan.

Since bin Laden found himself in Afghanistan in 1996, about 15-20 thousand guerillas from 50 countries, including such distant ones as Columbia, have been trained in these camps.

As a rule, they were trained in shooting from all types of infantry weapons, mining (including bomb assembling from TNT and plastic explosives), reconnaissance methods and techniques as well as in other diversion skills. Some camps were specialized, say, in destroying air targets, in producing poisonous substances or in ways of poisoning, in undermining buildings and other facilities, even in aircraft hijacking.

The training in practical skills was enforced by intensive study of the Koran, as well as by ideological, psychological and moral brainwashing.

The coalition

The *anti-terrorist coalition* (hereafter - coalition) can conventionally be divided into three main groups. These are: the USA; their allies in the military operation, i.e. those NATO countries that committed themselves to contributing their military potential to it (the UK, Spain, Germany, Italy, Canada, and France) together with Australia and the Northern Alliance; and, finally, about 40 partner-countries assisting in a certain way without being directly involved in the combat actions (among them are Russia, Ukraine and a number of Muslim countries like Jordan, Oman, Pakistan, Turkey, the Philippines, newly independent states of Central Asia, etc).

I wonder if George W. Bush could imagine, during his Presidential campaign when he promised to take a tougher stance towards Russia and failed to name the Pakistani leader, that less than a year after the election he would have to lead these countries in their joint battle on America's side? (See Table 2).

Table 2.

Land forces	USA	Crack troops (1000) and units of the 18th airborne corps Plus military personnel of the 10th Mountain Infantry division (1000). It is planned to transfer contingent from Kosovo (about 5300), Bosnia (about 3600) and from the US territory.
	Great Britain	Land forces and crack troops (total 20000)
	France	(total 4000), Spain (500), Germany, etc.
	Northern Alliance	15,000-16,000 people, 50 T55 and T62 tanks, artillery and helicopters.
Air forces	USA	45 B1, B2, B52 land-based heavy bombers, 10 U2 and ABAKC reconnaissance aircrafts,
Navy	USA	4 aircraft shock troops including: 15 squadrons of F-14A, F-14B, F-14D, F-18C, and EA68 aircrafts; 181 AH-1W Super Cobra, Sea Knight, CH-53 Sea Stallion, UH-1N Huey, MH-47, MH-60, and MH-6 helicopters; 26 surface ships of aircraft-carrier, cruiser, destroyer, storm-boat, and troop-carrier types 6 LOS ANGELES submarines, About 1300 Tomahawk cruise missiles About 4400 navy infantrymen (reinforcement is expected)
	Great Britain	1 atomic submarine 24 surface ships

One of the coalition's major characteristics, in the Afghanistan context, is that the USA plays a dominating role in it, only in what concerns planning and executing military strikes (missile attacks and air raids). Only Britons are allowed to fight as equals shoulder-to-shoulder with them, and not because the British armed forces are stronger than, say, the French ones, but because they are the closest and most reliable US military partners. It is only to them that the USA can entrust such know-how as the *Tomahawk* cruise missiles that are among the main means of fire assault.

Yet if ground operations are to take place, the US role will diminish - the Northern Alliance infantry will come to the fore, while special operations will, most probably, bring in not only the elite American units *Delta Force*, *SEALS* and rangers but also (or, maybe, primarily) the British and French special purpose units, experienced in fighting under the conditions of the local theater. Americans are not as good at speaking local languages or knowing local patterns and customs, neither are they trained to fight in the mountains. Their adaptation to the local situation will take several months. However, if the ground operations reach beyond Afghanistan, somewhere to the stony deserts or rainforests, the role of the US contingent will, obviously, grow again.

And the partners will, of course, do their best to help: with air corridors, infrastructure, money, medical doctors, information and undercover liaisons.

Combat operations in Afghanistan and their development scenarios

So, the first war fought by the USA, NATO and their allies in the XXI century began on Sunday, October 7, 2001. The air- and naval-borne *Tomahawk* cruise missiles were launched from the American and British cruisers and submarines against the Taliban air-defense facilities and control-and-command points. Heavy bomber aircraft *B1*, *B2* and *B52*, as well

planes dropped controlled and uncontrolled bombs at other military installations of the Taliban movement that had refused to hand over Osama bin Laden and his network of his terrorist training camps.

any of the American bombs carried inscriptions "N.Y.P.D." and "N.Y.F.D." to commemorate the policemen and fire fighters who perished in New York. It was the first time the bomber aircraft crew would spend 44 hours in the cockpit flying from the US military airbase *Waltman* in the state of Missouri to bomb objectives in Afghanistan and on the island of Diego Garcia. It was the first time in history that the deck aviation pilots would fly thousands of kilometers away from aircraft-carriers to fulfill their combat mission.

The operation began in a "parallel fashion". I mean, aircraft and cruise missiles started hitting their targets while the ground contingent was under formation. It is still being formed. Though, there are American and British secret service agents on the ground in Afghanistan performing intelligence and target-designation functions, as well as (according to some unconfirmed data) Russian advisors in the Panjsher canyon ready to assault Kabul in the ranks of the Northern Alliance.

As soon as three days after the bombardment air domination was claimed by the allied forces, and the deck aviation squadron commanders seemed more concerned about their younger subordinates' gaining combat experience than about destroying the few targets left intact.

The first week of war is coming to an end, the airforce is still bombing the Taliban force dislocations, the Northern Alliance is contemplating its next steps - whether to oust the Taliban first and then negotiate the distribution of power or vice versa, - and the coalition is hastily building up ground forces around Afghanistan bringing them in from Kosovo, Bosnia and from home (replacing them with reservists).

Listening to the news about the latest front developments I can't help asking myself what it means for that country this time. Is it just another war in Afghanistan or is it at last the beginning of normalization in that long-suffering state.

At this stage, the war does not seem to differ much from the operation pattern used against Iraq in 1991 and against Serbia in 1999. Like then, it started with gaining air supremacy by thoroughly conducting air and space surveillance, carrying out missile and bomb strikes against priority targets (air-defense facilities, command bases and air fields). Like then, additional reconnaissance of what had and what had not been destroyed, data correction and new air raids followed.

Yet since there is not much to bomb in Afghanistan, one can expect the early advance of the ground forces, firstly, the beginning of the special unit operations. The allies have to hurry in view of the approaching winter that is sure to paralyze all ground activities from mid November till late March next year.

There are, evidently, no plans to engage big ground contingents of the USA and its Western allies, though no such possibility can be ruled out. The rate of fighting trim of the coalition's special purpose units is also unclear. It is not unlikely that, in order to avoid insufficiently prepared ground operations leading to big losses, the effort will be temporarily shifted from attacking facilities in Kabul, Kandahar and other administrative centers towards providing direct air support of the defensive by the Northern Alliance and the former Talibs who will have defected to it.

In so doing, the allies will be paying their immediate attention to the soonest possible disruption of the Taliban management system - overthrowing or liquidating the movement leaders and high military commanders, ruining military headquarters and communications - and to the neutralization of their security service. The speedy disorganization of the Taliban will enable them to weaken the resistance (one can expect lots of deserters and defectors) and, consequently, to reduce losses.

Another major task is likely to be the actual seizure and occupation of administrative centers and infrastructure keypoints. This also should be done before the frost to make the enemy spend the winter in caves while the allied forces and the Northern Alliance can enjoy the relative comfort of cities and towns.

The Taliban is unlikely to be clinging to the towns - they must remember too well the situation in which the Soviet troops were trapped during that last war when only one third of their personnel could participate in military actions while the rest were busy guarding communications and other vulnerable objects. Besides, in this case the Taliban forces, should they remain concentrated in towns rather than hide in caves, will become, unlike their Soviet adversaries of two decades ago, an easy aim for aircrafts.

At the same time, they cannot survive long in the mountains, being completely isolated from the outer world, which, for the Taliban, is represented by Pakistan. Yet they need Pakistan not in its current status of a country whose leader is hostile to the Taliban, but as a donor of arms, ammunition and other goods necessary for partisan warfare. Which means that, abandoning towns and moving to the mountains, the Talibs will be trying hard to destabilize the situation in Pakistan.

Therefore the coalition forces, while occupying towns, will continue with their missile and air strikes against identified resistance groups (if the latter show any signs of activity). They will also try to close the Afghani-Pakistani border to the Talibs' penetration.

An amnesty will be granted to all the Talibs who will repent and those who won't will be "smoked out of their holes" in remote areas. The stamina of the coalition's advancing forces, their ability to win support of the majority of the local population right away, from their first contacts, will be a decisive factor determining the success of the whole operation in Afghanistan. So everything will be done to prevent mass civilian casualties and to supply the population with foodstuffs, medicines and other basic goods.

Reconnaissance and intelligence will not stop during wintertime so that next spring an attempt could be made to crush the rest of the enemy forces capable of resistance.

As to the *likely characteristics of the current operation*, one can expect, first, the shrinkage of the so-called "CNN factor", i.e. open, active and live TV reports from the ground that so far have tended to cause anxiety among military commanders at various levels because of the possible political implications or negative reaction from the US population. Such reports are hardly appropriate in this case, because it is a war on terrorists who are going to take revenge whenever and wherever possible, and also because, given the general mood in the Muslim countries that do not welcome this war, it is more expedient not to emphasize the US initiative in it, but, on the contrary, highlight the Afghani's interests and role they have to play in fighting the Taliban.

Besides, security requires that all the operation detail should be kept as secret as possible to ensure its abruptness and unexpectedness. Broadcasting just for the sake of broadcasting or to pass disinformation seems to make very little sense, as the majority of the Afghan population have neither radio nor television sets. Americans started to drop one-wave radios for the Afghani to be able to listen at least to the *SOLO* team - an air-based propaganda group.

Second, special conditions will probably encourage the coalition members, first of all, the USA, to resort to non-standard ways of action and new technologies. These can include new ammunition types for destroying mountain caves and fortifications, or certain 'non-deadly' technologies capable of minimizing civilian casualties, or else new protection, transportation and personnel targeting means, etc.

On the whole, if nothing extraordinary happens, at the initial stage of the operation the coalition forces can be expected to try to remove the Taliban authorities from power and facilitate the establishment of a friendly (at least, not hostile) government in Afghanistan, and at the next stage - to suppress the remaining armed opposition, create a favorable environment for the rectification and stabilization of the situation in the country.

Stage Two: Eliminating NESTLINGS AND Emptying feeding-troughs

The British Prime Minister Tony Blair has already stated: "The first phase is focused on Afghanistan and eliminating Osama bin Laden's terrorist network. The current military actions are the clue to it. But there will be a second phase, too, during which we will determine what steps are to be taken to get rid of all forms of international terrorism."

On October 8, the USA and Great Britain notified the UN Security Council about the reasons underlying their decision to launch the military strike against Afghanistan, claiming that they "reserve their right to attack other countries in the course of combating terrorism".

The "bad guys" were sent a clear message that no one has the slightest intention to court or placate them; they will be found and killed wherever the second stage of the anti-terrorist operation will catch them.

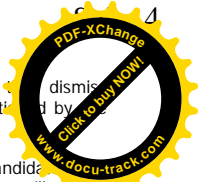
Today one can see that the second phase has already started. "Black" lists of terrorist organization have been publicized; in those lists 6 out of the 28 terrorist groups are identified as being connected with Osama bin Laden. They are al-Qaida, Uzbekistan Islamic Movement, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Pakistani Harakat ul-Mujahedin and Abu Sayyaf Group from the Philippines.

A number of ways of bringing pressure to bear on the states giving shelter to the terror groups have been designed. The Taliban example demonstrates that there can be no compromise here - either the state is with the terrorists or against them. And those who hope to step aside, watch and see what happens, run the risk of being left alone with their own problems next time they face them.

Under the circumstances, some of the Muslim leaders opposed to the terrorists who make use of the Islam, initiate cooperation, as the Philippines government did, for example. The link between the local Abu Sayyaf Group and Osama bin Laden having been traced and proven, the country's authorities volunteered assistance to the USA by offering their air corridors and two military bases - an air and a naval ones - to be used if needed.

The Palestinian authorities denounced terrorism as a means of achieving political or national goals and even used the police force to restrain their militant countrymen proclaiming support to bin Laden who keeps threatening America, Great Britain and their allies with continuing terrorist attacks.

Yet there are countries that do not hurry to condemn the terror attacks against the USA, instead, they accuse the Americans of state terrorism. At the same time they dismiss any references to their possible connection with the terrorists and refuse to accept their blame for giving haven to them. One of such countries most commonly criticized by the international community is Iraq.



Yet there are countries that do not hurry to condemn the terror attacks against the USA, instead, they accuse the Americans of state terrorism. At the same time, they dismiss any reference to their possible connection with the terrorists and refuse to accept their blame for giving haven to them. One of such countries most commonly criticized by the international community is Iraq.

The second stage can become actively implemented any time now, without waiting for the first stage to be completed. Given that among the potential "candidates" for the anti-terrorist coalition's special scrutiny are not only international terrorist organization but individual rogue states as well, one can presume that the military actions will not be limited to Afghanistan alone. Striving to punish the terrorists and to exterminate the phenomenon of state-supported terrorism, the USA and their allies recognize that the war campaign may last a long time. This campaign is liable to include a series of large-scale (and not so large) military actions or threats to use military force where necessary. And military force they have - compacted, mobile and highly professional (I wonder if they could have used our military reform programs to build up their armed forces).

Today it is hard to say when and how all this will end. The terrorists let Americans know how intensely they hate them - more than death itself. So, the Americans have no alternative to winning this fight, otherwise they will be doomed to disintegration as a nation or to absolute self-isolationism, which, basically, is the same. Let us hope they will master enough strength, patience and wisdom to overcome terrorism and come out of this battle stronger than ever.

Other materials:

[Publication source](#) [Contact the web-site editor](#)

If you notice a mistake, you may notify us by highlighting it and hitting Ctrl-Enter.